

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 05493 060257Z
ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 ICA-11 IO-13 OMB-01 AID-05 EB-08 SIL-01
LAB-04 /114 W

-----080339 060510Z /12

R 051111Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7529
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMCONSUL KARACHI
AMCONSUL LAHORE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 5493

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, ELAB, PK
SUBJECT: JOURNALISTS' STRIKE: THE END OF A BEGINNING?

REF: (A) ISLAMABAD 5288 (B) KARACHI 2657 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: THE LAHORE EDITION OF THE PRO-PAKISTAN PEOPLES PARTY (PPP) URDU DAILY MUSAWAAT, THE FOCUS OF A BITTER STRUGGEL BETWEEN THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION (MLA) AND RADICAL ELEMENTS IN THE JOURNALISTS' UNIONS (REFS), WAS REPUBLISHED JUNE 2. THE TONE OF THE PAPER WAS SIMILAR TO THAT OF ITS PRE-CLOSURE DAYS.
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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 05493 060257Z

THE MLA HAS RELEASED APPROXIMATELY FIFTY JOURNALISTS AND PRESS WORKERS FROM JAIL. AND A JUNE 3 "DAY OF PROTEST" CALLED BY RADICAL ELEMENTS IN THE JOURNALIST UNION FAILED TO MAKE A SPLASH.
END SUMMARY.

2. THE LAHORE EDITION OF THE PRO-PAKISTAN PEOPLES PARTY (PPP) URDU DAILY MUSAWAAT, WHICH WAS THE FOCUS OF A LENGTHY

DISPUTE BETWEEN THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION (MLA) AND RADICAL ELEMENTS IN THE JOURNALISTIC COMMUNITY, WAS REPUBLISHED JUNE 2. THE MLA HAD UNSEALED MUSAWAAT'S OFFICES AFTER AN AGREEMENT WAS REACHED (REF A) BETWEEN REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PUNJAB UNION OF JOURNALISTS (PUJ) AND THE MLA.

3. THE PAPER'S TONE AND FORMAT REMAIN BASICALLY UNCHANGED FROM THE LAHORE MUSAWAAT WE HAD COME TO KNOW AND LOVE BEFORE THE MLA SHUT IT DOWN MARCH 22. THE JUNE 2 ISSUE, FOR EXAMPLE, CARRIED THE ALMOST-REQUIRED FRONT PAGE PHOTOS OF FORMER PRIMIN BHUTTO AND HIS WIFE, NUSRAT. WHILE ESCHEWING DIRECT CRITICISM OF THE MLA, THE PAPER HAS ATTACKED THE PUJ-MLA AGREEMENT (MADE, THE PAPER CLAIMED BY A "GANG OF FOUR"), AND CONDEMNED CONSERVATIVE PRESSMEN AS THE "MAULANA KAUSER NIAZIS OF JOURNALISJ."

4. THE MLA HAS SO FAR RELEASED APPROXIMATELY 50 JOURNALISTS AND PRESS WORKERS. THE LOCAL REUTERS CORRESPONDENT (PROTECT) TOLD US JUNE 4 THAT THERE ARE PROBABLY ABOUT 50 PERSONS STILL IN DETENTION FOR THEIR PART IN THE MUSAWAAT PROTESTS. BY OUR RECKONING, ABOUT 90 DEMONSTRATORS HAD ACTUALLY RECEIVED SENTENCES.

5. THE RADICAL PRESSMEN, LED BY MINHAIJ BARNA AND CLUSTERED IN SEGMENTS OF THE ALL-PAKISTAN NEWSPAPER EMPLOYEES CONFEDERATION (APNEC) AND THE PAKISTAN FEDERAL UNION OF CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 ISLAMA 05493 060257Z

JOURNALISTS (PFUJ), CALLED OFF THEIR LAHORE HUNGER STRIKE MAY 31. TO SHOW THAT THEY WERE NOT DEFEATED, HOWEVER, THE RADICALS CONDEMNED THE PUJ'S AGREEMENT WITH THE MLA, AND CALLED FOR A "DAY OF PROTEST" JUNE 3. THE DAY PASSED WITHOUT INCIDENT, AND THE EFFORT HAS BEEN DECLARED A COMPLETE FLOP BY MOST OBSERVERS. THE PAKISTAN TIMES GAVE THE PROTEST DAY NO COVERAGE OTHER THAN APPEALS AGAINST THE ACTION, AND IT CARRIED SEVERAL STORIES ON THE RESOLUTIONS OF SUPPORT FOR THE PUJ-MLA AGREEMENT COMING IN FROM THE HINTERLAND. MUSAWAAT REPORTED THAT THEIR OWN WORKERS IN LAHORE DID HOLD A PROTEST MEETING ON JUNE 3 AND LISTENED TO SPEECHES EXHORTING THEM TO "CARRY ON THE STRUGGLE."

6. COMMENT: THE PUBLIC SPLIT BETWEEN RADICAL AND CONSERVATIVE MODERATE ELEMENTS IN THE PRESS IS WIDENING. ALTHOUGH BARNA AND HIS ALLIES MAY STILL HAVE SUPPORT AMONG SOME OFFICE HOLDERS IN APNEC AND PFUJ, HIS STRATEGY FOR AN IMMEDIATE, DIRECT CONFRONTATION WITH THE MLA HAS RUN INTO STRONG CONSERVATIVE INERTIA. WE DOUBT, HOWEVER, THAT BARNA IS COMPLETELY DISCREDITED. THE RELEASE OF THE PRESSMENT AND THE REPUBLICATION OF A STILL STRONGLY PRO-PPP MUSAWAAT, MAY SET THE STAGE FOR A FUTURE CONFRONTATION -- THE

BASIC POLITICAL ISSUES, SUCH AS DISCONTENT WITH THE MLA,
ARE STILL THERE TO BE EXPLOITED. HUMMEL

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: JOURNALISTS, STRIKE SETTLEMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 05 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978ISLAMA05493
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780235-0479
Format: TEL
From: ISLAMABAD
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780697/aaaadfkd.tel
Line Count: 118
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: c3923d92-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 ISLAMABAD 5288, 78 KARACHI 2657
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2493600
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: JOURNALISTS' STRIKE: THE END OF A BEGINNING?
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, ELAB, PK
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/c3923d92-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014